

Testimony of Amanda Thomashow

Hi. I'm Amanda Thomashow, founder and executive director of Survivor Strong, formerly known as "The 2014 Title IX Complaint."

Also, I'm tired—like, really tired—just like so many other survivors, of having to fight for rights and protections and a seat at the tables where people are discussing my best interests. So, I'm really grateful to Rep Slotkin for pulling out a chair and inviting me to this conversation. I'm so grateful for the opportunity to use my voice and my experience as a tool for education (and maybe even if revolution) today.

Plain and simple: DeVos' Rule would have seriously jeopardized my physical safety and my mental health.

I had significantly more protections under previous guidelines. In fact, now, I would have never had a Title IX claim to begin with. Even if they didn't believe me—and believe me, they did not—my school launched an investigation into Larry Nassar because of my report in 2014. That same complaint would serve as the catalyst for change years later. Under this new rule: that catalyst would have never existed.

Just as harrowing is the fact that under the new Rule (and because I didn't have a Title IX case) I would have never had access to critical campus resources like counseling and advocacy services. Secretary DeVos' Rule demands "more severe" acts of violence than I endured, a "more academic" context than I occupied, and the doctor's office to sit inside the geographic bounds of a lecture hall for the sexual assault to warrant an investigation.

Effectively, and without a doubt, this new rule will make it even more difficult to protect students from sexual assault and predators like the one I reported in 2014. It will also make it nearly impossible to hold institutions that enable sexual violence accountable—which is sadly one of the only mechanisms we currently have to incentivize student safety.

I hoped that filing my claim would change my campus by making it safer, but I didn't realize the full impact it would have. My Title IX was a call for community safety; by filing my report, a paper trail began that paved the way for accountability at Michigan State University. This new Rule would have excused MSU from any responsibility for the hundreds of young girls assaulted on their campus. DeVos saw the damage a paper trail could do when my Title IX complaint led to a 500 million dollar settlement. Now, she is lighting the paper trail on fire, and along with it the chance for future campus accountability or justice, all in favor of the financial interest of schools.

Instead of stepping up and demanding campus safety, the Department of Education has carved victim-blaming and victim-shaming myths into federal policy. It's clear that the new rules do not aim to protect students. It's also clear that the new rules will not protect students who occupy marginalized spaces, and it is likely to disproportionately harm them—which has a chilling effect on access to education at large. Through this new set of rules, it is clear that Secretary DeVos prioritizes the agenda of the few, rather than protecting the safety and education of all (including the most vulnerable students).

So, my message to whoever is tuning in right now:

Their message might be loud, but our love can be louder.

This new Rule silences survivors, erases survivor's stories from the *literal* record, and prioritizes the mitigation of liability over the wellness of students. But that doesn't have to be the end of it.

We don't have to just sit back and let oppressive systems win. We don't even have to rely on systems that were originally built by people who benefited from oppression.

Now is the time for us to reimagine a world that is anti-violent. A world where we invest in programs and resources that keep our communities safe and our fellow humans taken care of.

I'm not sure if we will ever change DeVos's mind but a new day is coming. These rules don't have to be a barrier. They can just be an obstacle on the road to forcing the interests of schools to align with the interests and safety of students.